



Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration  
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**SAMHSA**  
**Advisory**

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## **SAMHSA LAUNCHES INITIATIVE TO FIGHT STIGMA AND DISCRIMINATION ASSOCIATED WITH MENTAL ILLNESSES**

*Elimination of Barriers Initiative Beginning in Eight States*

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) announced today the launch of its Elimination of Barriers Initiative (EBI) in eight States: California, Florida, Massachusetts, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Texas, and Wisconsin. The EBI is a three-year initiative aimed at identifying effective public education approaches to combat the stigma and discrimination associated with mental illnesses.

"All Americans must understand that mental illnesses are illnesses that can be diagnosed reliably, treated effectively and that recovery is possible," said SAMHSA Administrator Charles G. Curie. "Sadly, misconceptions about mental illness continue and many people hide their symptoms and avoid treatment. The Elimination of Barrier Initiative is designed to help more Americans understand the facts surrounding mental illness, reduce stigma and increase their willingness to seek help for mental health problems."

The Elimination of Barriers Initiative, funded with \$5.4 million over three years, will allow for a series of meetings in each state to reach consensus on steps that states can take to reduce the stigma associated with mental illness. Strategies developed by the EBI are expected to focus on opportunities for action in schools and businesses.

About 5-7 percent of adults, in any given year, have a serious mental illness, according to several nationally representative studies. A similar percentage of children, about 5-9 percent, have a serious emotional disturbance. The annual prevalence figures translate into millions of adults and children disabled by mental illness. Almost half of these individuals do not seek treatment, in part because of the shame associated with mental illnesses in our society. The President's New Freedom Commission on Mental Health, whose goal is to recommend improvements to enable adults with serious mental illnesses and children with serious emotional disturbances to live, work, learn, and participate fully in their communities, has identified stigma as one of the major barriers to mental health care in America.

"Stigma promotes barriers, both visible and invisible, that stand between an individual and the freedom of opportunity upon which this nation was founded," added Gail Hutchings, Acting Director for SAMHSA's Center for Mental Health Services. "It's time to tear down those barriers, and pave the way for all Americans to access needed services."

To officially launch the EBI, a State Partnership Meeting will take place in each of the target States. This meeting will feature an overview of the EBI as well as provide a public forum for stakeholders and other interested parties to discuss ways to counter stigma and discrimination. This input will then be used to make the EBI more effective.

*The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, a public health agency within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, is the lead Federal agency for improving the quality and availability of substance abuse prevention, addiction treatment, and mental health services in the United States. More information on SAMHSA's programs is available on their Web site, [www.samhsa.gov](http://www.samhsa.gov).*